

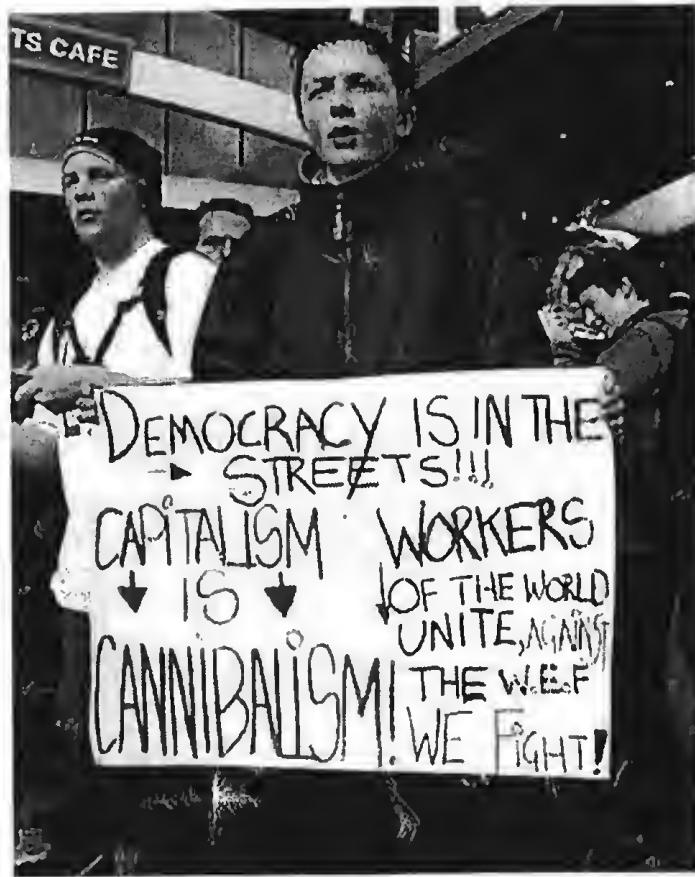
# **Socialist Review**

## **of Aotearoa/New Zealand**

For a socialist and democratic alternative

Issue 5 Summer 2000/01 \$2

**We  
can  
make**



**a difference!**

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+ Prague and the Web p.9***

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Socialist Review welcomes your letters:  
Please send to either of the addresses below

**Socialist Review**  
ISSN 1175-2629

Published by the  
International Socialist Organisation  
P O Box 6157, Dunedin North, New Zealand  
All subscription/distribution enquiries to  
P O Box 11207, Wellington, NZ  
All email enquiries: [isonz@hotmail.com](mailto:isonz@hotmail.com)  
Website: [www.isonz.homestead.com](http://www.isonz.homestead.com)

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Terry Eagleton on  
Culture Wars, Trotsky,  
Tino Rangatiratanga,  
news, views and  
campaigns. To  
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# Closing the gaps?

At first sight the "Business Community's" (read Ruling Class) savage and virtually unrelenting attacks on the Labour Government seem a bit strange. After all last November's election didn't exactly represent the coming to power of a radically reformist movement – and so Roger Kerr's comparison of it to the Socialist/Communist coalition in France in the early 1980s, amongst other things, looks like near-hysterical exaggeration.

No one on the left should harbour any illusions about the nature of the present government. It is committed to continuing the New Right economic and social policies which many of its current members began to implement back in 1984.

Labour's position is essentially that the "reforms" of the past decade and a half were a Good Thing, but that some of them may have gone a bit too far and caused a bit too much suffering. The few changes brought about so far (like the renationalisation of ACC and the Employment Relations Act) have a lot more to do with fine-tuning the system than changing it.

Fundamentally, Labour and the "Business Community" are actually in strong agreement about economic (and most other) policies. They both believe that the invisible hand of the market will set prices and wages with the greatest efficiency, that workers and their bosses have a common interest in making NZ business more competitive internationally, and so on.

Why then the apoplectic response from Mr. Kerr and his friends?

Firstly, because unlike, for instance, the British Labour Party (which came to power in 1997 effectively promising to Britain's rulers the prospect of continuing the previous 18 years of Conservative Government attacks, without the stain of corruption and sleaze and with an ultraslick PR/spin campaign behind it), the Labour Party here articulated a goal of not imposing any major new attacks on workers, students, and beneficiaries. They even promised to lift a few of the harshest features of the old regime (the Contracts Act and student loan interest, for instance). And unlike the National Government elected at the end of 1990, who promised much the same thing, they haven't done an immediate complete about-face once in office.

Secondly, our rulers have a nasty habit of responding out of all proportion to the (very minimal) threats they occasionally perceive themselves as being faced with by reforming governments.

In the 1890s, when basic democratic rights for most of the population to vote in elections (before 1890 there wasn't even universal *male* suffrage) brought the very moderate Liberal Party to power, one offended gentleman politician commented that "The larrikin pothouse element has captured the Treasury benches."

The vitriolic editorials and savage cartoons seen today bear remarkable similarities to those that appeared after Labour first came to power in 1935. Think of the absurd attacks on Nandor Tanczos for

attempting to openly discuss cannabis use for instance, or on Māori MPs who dare to raise questions about the appalling crimes committed against their people since colonisation.

The attacks on Tanczos and the ridiculous "brain drain" claims are one side of all this. A far nastier response has been the use of racism. This has included the somewhat more subtle and sophisticated attacks on Tariana Turia and Sandra Lee. Their crime was to suggest that the annihilation of most of the Māori population during the nineteenth century might be regarded as a holocaust (Turia clearly differentiated between this and the Jewish Holocaust of the Second World War – a fact conveniently ignored by the media).

The message to white racists is very clear.

It has also included the much more openly racist rantings of ACT leader Richard Prebble, who continues to try to fill the redneck gap left open by NZ First with his statements about young, skilled, professional (i.e. white) New Zealanders leaving the country to be replaced by unskilled (i.e. not white) foreigners.

And how has Labour responded to all this? By rallying its large support base to counter the attacks of the Roundtable and their cronies? By defending the rights of ordinary people to a decent standard of living? By pointing out that 15 years of uninterrupted New Right experimentation has left most people on lower real incomes than

in 1980 and unemployment still chronically high (despite grossly massaged statistics)?

Well, er, no.

Labour has backed down on some of the already very timid reforms. Clark, Cullen et al. are desperately reassuring business breakfasts around the country of their "business-friendly" nature, whilst according to Wellington's *Evening Post*, cabinet ministers are even staying behind late at parliament in the evenings to attend business

education forums where they get to find out more about how business works so they can fine-tune their policies to better suit it!

All this leads naturally to a point that has always been right at the heart of the socialist critique of Labour Party-style reformist politics: That is, of course, the simple fact that real power does not lie in parliament, but in the boardrooms of our big corporations and all the other inner sanctums of the judges, bishops and vice-chancellors who exercise the real economic and

social power in capitalist society.

So when Helen Clark complains that "some people just can't accept the election result" she rather misses the point. This government, like every other before it, is utterly constrained by and reliant on "business," to the extent that it is moving to "moderate" even the extremely timid reforms already proposed.

And we are willing to bet that, at the end of its term, far from closing any gaps, Labour will leave them bigger and more gaping than ever. ■

# CRITICAL NOTES

## Gush v. Bore — the race that wasn't

As *Socialist Review* goes to print, the absurdities of the U.S. general election continue. Regardless of the outcome of various legal wranglings, we can assure readers with some certainty that the end result is almost certainly an irrelevance. Tweedledum — or should that be Dubja? — and Tweedledee not only share the same policies — they share the same intellectual, ethical and political bankruptcy. In a country where the entire balance of power can rest in the recount of one county area — and where the so called "popular" ballot is not decisive — it should come as no surprise that in most recent presidential elections not even half of the population has bothered voting.

Despite vague liberal posturings to the contrary, there is no difference between the Republican

and Democratic camps. If you want evidence of this, look to the last eight years of Clinton/Gore — years when federal government jobs have been slashed, governmental inaction has made abortions more difficult to access and a so-called economic "boom" cannot even bring the average wage back up to



*Don't get too excited Al*

where it was before Reagan. Clinton has involved the U.S. in more military engagements than the last three presidents combined. The number of executions carried out in 1999 was more than double that of 1990. The average CEO salary increased from 85 times that of the normal

worker in 1990 to 475 times in 1999 while the number of people without health insurance increased by ten million. Even during his first term — when Democrats still controlled Congress — Clinton didn't mention the minimum wage even once in any public statement. The last eight years of Clinton/Gore have been ones of attacks on workers, women and blacks. Gore is not worth voting for.

Of course, it should be obvious — even if only on a "sins of the fathers" basis — that George Bush Jnr. is not worth voting for either. The governor of Texas — famous for its frequent

murders and massive inadequate health funding — stands for everything bad about capitalism. He has lead a state that systematically ignores and victimises its poor, maintains a state sponsored slaughter and is rated second to worst in a list of terrible welfare systems. Bush is Gore without liberal make-up. They are two sides of the same coin.

But the U.S. election should not be an entirely depressing spectacle for socialists. They provide ample — and often amusing — evidence of the sham that is liberal democracy, and prove more openly than



*Ralph Nader — vote-splitter?*

anything else how this "democracy" is in fact designed to keep "we the people" from real power. A strong and well organised



*Bush – carrying on a fine family tradition?*

campaign by Green candidate Ralph Nader suggests there may be newly strengthened opposition to the two party system. And, above all, election years get people talking about politics. We need to ensure that the legacy of the Clinton years is more than a series of sick jokes about cigars – we need to use the farce of 2000 to show that the only solution to the real problems in society doesn't lie in one vote, but in the power of the people beyond the vote.

## Massey strike "a success"

900 staff at Massey University in Palmerston North, Albany and Wellington went on strike for better conditions and that rare thing in modern universities – good will from administration.

Peter Blakey, of the Association of University Staff at Massey said, "What was wonderful about the day was the great spirit of comradeship among the picketers," and he pointed

out that union membership at Massey has increased by 30 percent. This proves that AUS's traditional conservatism is not what its members want – actions like strikes and real solidarity for protecting their jobs and conditions are.

Although the actions at Massey were not particularly radical – the strike went on only until lunchtime – the staff who instigated them deserve support and recognition. This strike was the first held at Massey but, if the administration continues to ignore and mistreat its workers, it may not be the last. There is still power in our unions.

## "Mean spirited attack on students"?

When National scrapped the Community Wage for students over summer, then opposition spokesperson Steve Maharey described this as a "mean spirited attack on students," and promised that, when Labour was elected to government, this decision would be reversed.

*Socialist Review* has grave concern about the damage that may at some time have been done to the Honourable Steve Maharey's long-term memory. Now in Government, this one-time author of the little-read classic "Socialists in the Labour Party," found no room to carry out his promise and, in a slipped moment, led both Labour

and the Alliance in voting against the Greens' amendment to give the Emergency Unemployment Benefit back to students!

Mean spirited, anyone? The Labour/Alliance sell-out was protested during a national day of action by small but committed groups of students. In Dunedin a group of around 20 students occupied WINZ, Education Ministry and IRD offices, sending faxes of protest to Mr Maharey. Now, more than ever, it is clear that the only real changes we will see from this government are the ones we force from them.

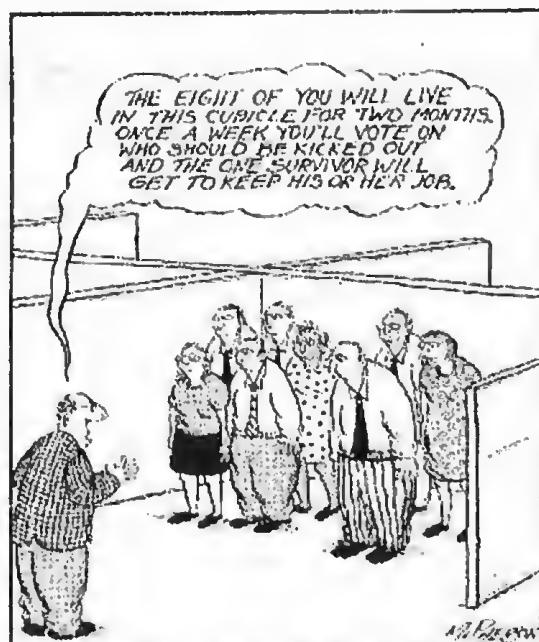
## Immigration

The hypocrisy of the Labour/Alliance Government has been revealed far more chillingly in another recent decision. The mainstream media reported the government's new amnesty

for overstayers but forgot to point out that this amnesty is an entree for new, "tough" (i.e. unjust) immigration laws.

And – crucially – this amnesty does not apply to those who have applied for refugee status. This puts the lives of many recent refugees from China at risk if they are forced to return to their homes and in late September many went on hunger strike in Central Auckland to try and convince the government to let them stay.

Why are Labour and the Alliance so keen to send people back to a brutally repressive state? Green MP Keith Locke put the objection to this sort of heartlessness well: "these people are prepared to risk their lives to become New Zealand citizens." The Chinese hunger strikers deserve our support: New Zealand's immigration laws are racist and unjust. ■



*Inspired by recent television events, Mills Industries devised a new way to downsize.*

# *Melbourne and Prague:*

The protests at the World Economic Forum in Melbourne were a massive success. Over the course of three days an estimated 20-30,000 people managed to disrupt capitalism's business as usual, and joined a growing list of sites around the world, starting with Seattle, where capitalism has been put on trial.

S11 was a victory in a number of ways. Firstly, by disrupting the forum, we showed that people united can challenge the power of the system. On Monday September 11 about one third of delegates were unable to get into the meeting, while many others were significantly inconvenienced.



## **ON THE BARRICADES!**

The next day the world saw the vicious response of the ruling class when people start acting (as opposed to talking) to stop them carrying out their murderous agenda. Despite the police violence, many delegates were forced to either

arrive by boat or helicopter. On day three, the cheers that some 10,000 people got as they marched through the streets of Melbourne showed the real level of community support for the protesters.

Secondly, for a few brief days, everything was open to question, including the system itself. Everywhere from the crowds at the blockade, to schools, workplaces, to people's homes, political discussion raged about the nature of the system, what's wrong with it, and how to change it.

In the mainstream media all manner of ruling class figures and their lackeys were forced to abandon their usual smug complacency and actually attempt to defend their barbaric system. For many, this amounted to stating that, as they get richer, so will everyone else, ie. the world's pretty fucked, but ... err, more of the same will fix it.



One idea pushed in the media is that the blockade was an attempt to simply "get our message across" to the delegates. The notion that the members of the WEF are people "just like us", who can be persuaded to see that their system is destroying the world – and therefore to change their ways – is a reformist fantasy.

These people know exactly what they are doing. They have been doing it for the last 200 years, and meetings such as the Forum allow them to plan how to do this more efficiently. The WEF has been one of the driving forces in attempts to prop up capitalism in recent years. Among its brainchildren are bodies such as the World Trade Organisation and various neo-liberal schemes to drive down wages, smash unions and wreck environmental protection.

Our protests have made a difference to the way institutions like the WEF, WTO and the International Monetary Fund talk. Clinton was forced to declare during the abortive WTO meeting last year that he was "glad the protesters had come".

But far from being an indication of any real intention to alter the system, such rhetoric is an attempt to co-opt and neutralise dissent. As World Bank President James Wolfensohn said when responding to protesters during S26 in Prague: "Something is wrong when the richest 20 per cent of the global population receive more than 80 per cent of the global income ... [you've only just realised this, James?] ... Our challenge is to make globalisation an instrument of opportunity and inclusion – not fear."

Another important issue is the



confusion that we were protesting against "globalisation", in the sense of the reduction of tariff barriers and other restrictions on so-called free trade. While there was undeniably some feeling among some participants (as there was at Seattle) that the answer to the problems of globalisation lay in a return to the past, these sentiments were in the minority. Most people who were there had come, as our slogan declared, to "Shut Down the WEF". They wanted to do more than just tinker around the edges of the system.

In spite of mobilisations like S11, there is a widespread idea that people in the First World are apathetic, happy with their commodity-filled lives, and sated by TV pulp. So, the argument goes, we can only get people to demonstrations if we're not too radical.

However in the past few years there have been a number of significant mobilisations – by workers and others – against the bosses' attacks on our conditions, against racism and in support of migrants' and Indigenous rights – that indicate otherwise.

In 1996, workers stormed Parliament in Canberra, expressing widespread anger at the Howard government. After the rise of One Nation in 1996, militant demonstrations involving high school and university students, workers and Aborigines were central to pushing the racists back to the political fringes. In 1998 thousands rallied and were inspired by the stand taken by the Maritime Union of Australia against Peter Reith's union busting. Melbourne S11 has again shown the underlying discontent which can be mobilised when given a focus.

The common features of these protests which make them significant are their size and militancy. Seattle last November, condemned by the world's media, bosses and governments as "violent" and "unlawful", has inspired hundred of thousands to follow suit in city after city.

On the other hand, the passive, respectable Walks for Reconciliation, while showing that hundreds of thousands of Australians want an end to racism, did not serve to mobilise any numbers to protest during the Olympics.

"Blockading" has become popular – from anti-globalisation protests, to truckies, farmers and workers protesting

against skyrocketing fuel prices. And the Yugoslavian revolution began with drivers blockading city streets.

Globalisation, contrary to the bosses' plans, has made it easier for workers and oppressed groups to identify with the struggles of others around the world – because the issues are so similar. The rich are getting richer while the rest of us are subjected to insecure jobs, longer working hours, poor or no housing, and declining social services.

The success of protests such as Seattle, Melbourne S11 and Prague S26 are a reflection of the underlying discontent felt by millions around the world. That is why the authorities react with such brutality. They know this discontent is there and they can't do anything about it, because to do so would mean giving up some of their profits and power.

On the other hand, it's clear that masses of people are prepared to stand up to bosses and governments if they think it might make a difference. Militancy and determined action might outrage the respectable commentators, but they inspire those who want to see justice in this world.

**Joseph Cross & Sandra Bloodworth**



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## The Media & S11

Many people involved in S11 were very concerned that we get the media on side so that we can get our message out to the "masses". They think that if the media gives us unfavourable coverage then we're stuffed because all the mums and dads out in the suburbs will just believe the media uncritically. So when the media gave its hysterical coverage many people were demoralised because they thought that everyone would just believe the media as if it's some all powerful "brainwashing" farce.

But this simply isn't the case. While many people undoubtably believed the media coverage, many more saw through its lies. When Socialist Alternative held its regular stalls in Melbourne after S11 we put up a sign inviting people to sign an open letter to the *Herald Sun* condemning its coverage of S11. People flocked to the stall to sign the letter and to talk about how bad the media coverage was. The majority of them said that they hadn't been on the protest but it was obvious how biased the media coverage was.

The media simply isn't the all powerful farce many people think it is. If the media was all powerful then surely there would have been very few people at S11 given the scare campaign the media ran against it.

The fact that people aren't that easily "brainwashed" is demonstrated by the enormous effort the ruling class has to expend to try and convince the rest of society of its ideas. Right from birth the ruling class tries to shave its ideologies down our throats through education and the media among other methods. A great example of this is the enormous amount of money spent on public relations, advertising and marketing (30% of the GDP of the United States is spent on these things).

People aren't that easily brainwashed because their daily experiences often contradict the official ideas of society. Workers who work hard and long hours but still struggle to make ends meet are

unlikely to swallow the ruling class idea that if only you work hard you'll be well off; or that we live in a "relaxed and comfortable Australia" when the government hires masked thugs with attack dogs to scab on your strike.

So instead of worrying too much about what the media says, activists should be talking to as many people as they can, to tell them what really happened and why, instead of relying on the media to do their political work for them. ■

**Chris Haan**

## The revolution will be live

Prague and the web: [www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org)

The Prague S26 protests (September 24-28) continued a campaign of anti-globalisation actions. In the tradition of previous blockades like Melbourne S11, Prague S26 successfully disrupted the World Bank/International Monetary Fund conference.

Delegates had to be spirited in to the conference centre, and became virtual prisoners as blockades were established outside. The protesters managed to force the conference to close a day early and to prevent delegates swanning off to an opera on S27.

Something like 15,000 protesters from all over Europe took part in S26, including contingents of workers representing some unions from Turkey and Greece. Socialist material sold well and debate took place at a socialist counter-conference organised in the days before S26.

In the aftermath of Melbourne S11 and Prague S26, activists are planning more protests. Several thousand protested at O3 in Boston against the presidential debate at the University of Massachusetts. Actions also took place against the Fortune 500 meeting in Austin, Texas and against the Asia-European meeting in Seoul, Korea – both dubbed O13.

Much of the useful coverage of the anti-globalisation events has been carried by the multimedia outfit, Indymedia, which is represented on the internet, on radio and on the streets.

The Indymedia websites contain media presentations in video, audio text and chatline format. One can't help comparing the Indymedia sites, in terms of reporting, to the mainstream media sites, like the BBC. BBC articles are edited for length, are presented as given, and abound in the predictable clichés of the mainstream. Activists are presented as faceless, mindless – and a threat to normal society. The mainstream media makes no attempt to accurately represent what happens from the point of view of participants. ■

By contrast, Indymedia is much more useful for those who want to really get a feel for what it was like to be involved in the protests. This aim flows almost seamlessly into meeting the needs of activists – the need for discussion, clarification and organisation.

Indymedia is a riot of participation. Video and audio clips are not just presented to subscribers, but the material is drawn from uploads from the activist community itself.

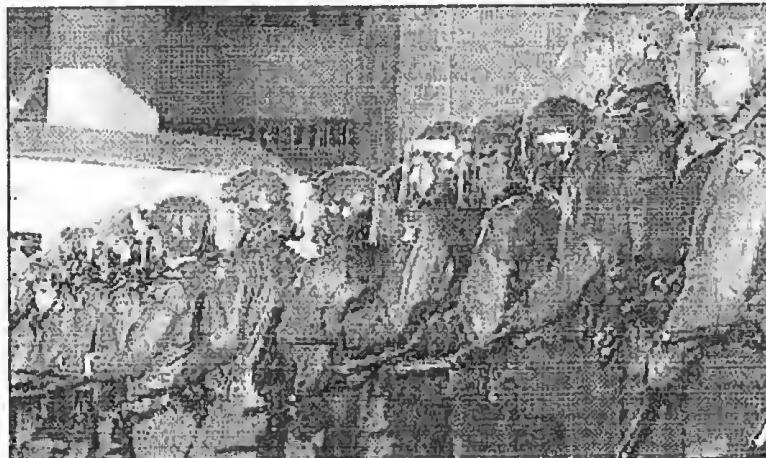
Indymedia does not just present unchallenged reports, but instead allows them to be constructed by Indymedia surfers and protest participants. The cut and thrust of how these



reports are decided, the balance of truth that can only come from democratic contribution, is presented at first hand.

The other exciting feature of the Indymedia websites is that their existence is tied directly to the broad anti-globalisation movement. So Indymedia websites mushroom around the world as the protests take place. The Melbourne and Sydney Indymedias were created with S11; Prague's with S26.

Indymedia now has websites in 34 cities spread through 10 countries (including Mexico, Congo and Israel) and is translated into multiple languages. We can only hope that



Indymedia keeps expanding and starts to form links with the independent media of other struggles, like those of the Serbian student movement. ■

**Tony Martin**

# Yugoslavia: It's a...

We have witnessed the first revolution of the new millennium. The butcher Milosevic was its victim. For years Milosevic repressed strikes and opposition movements with severe brutality, using the military to shoot down strikers, demonstrators, and persecuted minorities.

In the first week of October, when he refused to accept electoral defeat to Vojislav Kostunica, candidate of the democratic opposition, the workers of Yugoslavia rose up and overthrew Milosevic.

Demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people happened day after day against Milosevic, and in this climate of political crisis, which paralleled similar events in 1997, the working class began to use its muscle. Political strikes broke out across the country, involving coal miners, transport, electricity and telecommunications workers.

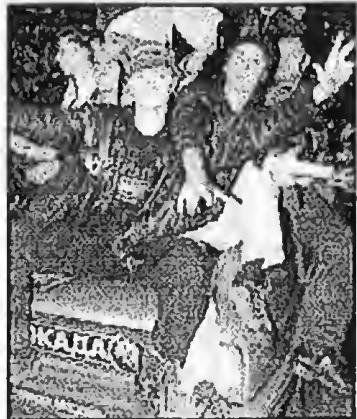
Anti-Milosevic workers and students marched on Belgrade, and determined not to be beaten back, stormed the parliamentary buildings and other important government offices. The police, after half-hearted attempts at opposing the crowds, realised they were powerless in the face of the determined mass of workers, and changed sides.

Workers in the state-run media, disgusted at the pro-Milosevic coverage, went on strike, and made sure that coverage ever since has supported the movement. The army,

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seeing which way the wind blew, backed off, and refused to support Milosevic, staying "neutral".

The mood on the streets was ecstatic. As a journalist reported, "you couldn't help grinning as you walked around, almost every person wore a huge smile and was cheering and laughing". As the grind of daily life was swept away, and people gained a sense of their own power to change things, the transformation in people was dramatic. The classic scenes of revolution.



## Why did it win this time?

In 1997 the movement was smaller, and failed to mobilise the key sections of the working class, many of whom are outside Belgrade. Furthermore, the regime was able to play off different sections of the movement against one another. This time, the working class was central to the events. Early on, workers in one of the major mining centres struck and occupied their pit.

This was decisive. Both because the workplace was massive, involving thousands of workers, but also because of the political implications. A coal shortage would shut down the entire country, and the success of the miners in routing the police showed early on the powerlessness of the regime in the face of determined strike action.

Workers all over the country blockaded roads, bringing transport to a standstill and other strikes shut down different sections of industry. This action was so general it was well beyond the control of Kostunica, who in fact spent much of the crisis calling for calm.

Frightened by the mass of working class people fighting determinedly against the regime, Milosevic's former allies in the army and the police force saw that to preserve their fragile system intact, they would have to throw in their lot with Kostunica, who was the only prominent political figure with a chance of returning things to something like capitalist stability, and had the added benefit of being acceptable to the West.

## But what exactly has the uprising done?

Clearly, it has swept away Milosevic's dictatorship in favour of a democracy led by Kostunica. But this democracy will be presided over by much of the same state apparatus, the same generals, police chiefs and bureaucrats who faithfully served Milosevic for years.

Perhaps more importantly, the heads of industry, who have been imposing cuts on working class living standards since the crisis hit Yugoslavia in the mid '80s, will remain the same. Many of them will probably prefer a "democratic" Yugoslavia, since it will be easier for them to do business with the rest of Europe, and sanctions will no longer block supplies.

Kostunica is not at all left-wing. Calling him a moderate would be overly charitable. In reality, he is a nationalist, only a little less extreme than Milosevic himself, and not at all sympathetic to the needs of working people. The minorities in Serbia, persecuted under Milosevic, have not much to look forward to under the new regime, and have expressed concerns that Kostunica will be little better than his predecessor.

But the masses who have made the revolution gained greater freedom to organise and resist these capitalists. The working class movement, persecuted under Milosevic, will now have the space, created by the uprising itself, to grow and develop, as will organisations like OTPOR! (Resistance!), a radical student organisation that played a major role in the uprising. Out of these elements, the seeds of a new left can emerge, that can lead a fight, not just against dictatorship, but against capitalism itself.

**Marc Newman**

# Victory is sweet:

When demonstrators peacefully blockaded the world's richest corporations at the World Economic Forum we were abused as violent rabble who "deserved all they got".

Look at the different response to the Yugoslav revolution where demonstrators succeeded in neutralising the army and police, thereby winning victory over the dictator Milosevic.



Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, even Johnny Howard all praised the masses as freedom fighters. Who cared that they burnt down most of the Parliament, destroyed the state-run radio, burnt dozens of cars belonging to the rich, and were threatening cops who did not give up their guns with their lives?

Who cared that the coal miners were threatening electricity supplies with their strikes?

The hypocrisy might make you sick. But think about it. These leaders, with their sanctimonious denunciations of much more peaceful protests in their own countries support whatever means are necessary when it suits their ends.

Fortunately for the Yugoslav population, the West wanted Milosevic overthrown. If they had supported him, as they regularly do support dictators, we'd now be hearing of the need to bomb the shit out of the country, because of all the lawless violence.

Remember their praises for the Yugoslav revolution when next they try to intimidate our protest movements into inactivity for the sake of respectability. They do not value non-violence as a principle – only when it suits their ends.

And remember, it was the militant strikes and actions of the mass movement which put the armed forces on the defensive, not a peaceful picnic. ■

**Sandra Bloodworth**



# 1917: Days of Hope

"Whole country is wild with joy, waving red flags and singing Marseillaise. It has surpassed my wildest dreams and I can hardly believe it is true. After two and a half years of mental suffering and darkness I at last begin to see light. Long live Great Russia who has shown the world the road to freedom. May Germany and England follow in her steps." So Morgan Phillips Price, who was in Russia writing for the *Manchester Guardian*, described the mood in February 1917 when the Russian people threw off centuries of tyrannical rule under the tsars.

However, despite such powerful accounts of the huge steps forward in human liberation taken in 1917, in recent years there has been a steady flow of books which attempt to paint the revolution as a fundamentally undemocratic event which ruined millions of lives - partly in order to deny that 1917 has any relevance to changing the world today.

The dominant view of the revolution in these books is that it was not the act of the majority in society, but that



**The importance of the 1917 Russian revolution is still hotly debated. But unfortunately most historical accounts now portray the events of that time as an undemocratic coup by the Bolsheviks that set the stage for the horrors of Stalinism. In this feature article, we take an in-depth look at what really happened in those days of hope.**

of a handful of self appointed revolutionaries who took advantage of the situation to install themselves in power. So Richard Pipes, author of *The Russian Revolution 1899-1919*, argues that "Lenin, Trotsky, and their associates seized power by force... The government they founded... derives from a violent act carried out by a tiny minority." And Orlando Figes, whose recent book *A People's Tragedy* has been widely praised, concurs, "The October insurrection was a coup d'état."

The logical conclusion of these arguments is that the seeds of Stalinism, one party rule and despotic terror were present in the way the Bolsheviks took power.

Not only are these claims intended as ideological attacks on the very idea of social revolution, but they are based on the worst historical inaccuracies, misquotes and unaccredited assertions. These range from statements about Lenin's "lust for power" and his "destructive instincts" backed up by quotes from enemies of the Bolsheviks, if at all – to the ludicrous assertions in Figes that Lenin went weight training as "part of the macho culture (the black leather jackets, the militant rhetoric, the belief in action and the cult of violence) that was the essence of Bolshevism." In the light of such assaults, the need to reclaim the Russian Revolution for the socialist tradition is more important than ever.

Russia in 1917 was predominantly a peasant country. Less than a fifth of the 160 million population lived in towns. The working class, though small – 3 million – was concentrated in huge industrial centres. Politically, Russia was an absolutist monarchy headed by tsar Nicholas – an empire that held many different oppressed nationalities within its borders. It was a repressive society: workers did not have the right to strike, form independent trade unions, or to negotiate collectively with employers.

The period immediately before the First World War was marked by huge strikes, but war broke that militancy – temporarily. The reality of waging a war that outlasted the expectations of the establishment soon resulted in rising food prices and continued carnage at the front. In February 1917 anger exploded with further food restrictions. Thousands of housewives and women factory workers surged onto the streets. Soldiers refused to fire on the rioters, marching with them to the tsarist parliament shouting, "Bread," "Down with the tsar," and, "Stop the war." Hundreds of thousands struck and demonstrators clashed with troops. Workers armed themselves and, decisively, whole regiments of soldiers deserted to the side of the workers. Within 48 hours the tsar was overthrown, replaced by a provisional government.

There is general agreement about the February Revolution that it was a genuine, spontaneous revolutionary upsurge – as opposed to the "undemocratic" October insurrection. But while it is true that the February Revolution was not "called" by anyone, least of all the Bolsheviks who were slow to respond, rank and file Bolsheviks were an organic part of the revolution. The best militants in every workplace were often members or supporters of the Bolsheviks. Here was not a party floating above workers' heads waiting to swoop down and seize power, but one integrally part of that class.

After February the key forces in Russian society were the old order, the generals keen to smash the revolution; the workers' parties, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks; and the Social Revolutionaries who traditionally represented the peasantry, and therefore had a base in the army, but were mainly led by intellectuals. The provisional government consisted predominantly of industrialists glad to be rid of the tsar – but only to make Russian capitalism more effective – allied to big landowners. Increasingly they would rally behind the counter-revolutionary forces. The Social Revolutionary Kerensky joined the government to appease the masses.

The February Revolution inspired workers with a sense of their own strength. Within weeks workers across Russia had set up their own democratically elected

soviets (workers councils). Factory committees were established which placed workers' control on the agenda. The tsarist state apparatus was dismantled. The police were replaced by workers' militias. Across the country peasants began to seize land for themselves, and established their own committees. National groups saw in the demise of tsarism the potential for self determination and an end to Great Russian oppression. The soviets and committees went beyond dealing with economic questions – and took on a political role. The democratic organisations represented the embryo of the workers' state. Both Pipes and Figes hail the provisional government as the embodiment of democracy, despite the fact that the soviets were infinitely more democratic in representing and involving the majority.

The coexistence of the soviets and the provisional government meant there were two powers in Russian society uneasily balanced. Although supported by the majority, the predominantly Menshevik leadership of the soviets was nervous about taking power, agreeing instead to support the government. The government knew that, while it held formal power, all real power lay with the soviets – the organisations that workers and soldiers viewed as their own.

As the year wore on, the economic situation worsened. The horrific slaughter in the trenches continued, and millions of peasants were denied land by a government anxious to appease landowners. The government refused independence to Finland, angering many whose desire for self determination was fuelled by the revolution. Growing numbers of workers became suspicious of the "moderate" socialists who propped up the unpopular government. As support drained away from the government towards the soviets, it

drained away within the soviets from the Mensheviks towards the only party that opposed the coalition government and argued for a government of working people: the Bolsheviks.

In July the anger and frustration erupted into an armed demonstration of thousands trying to force the soviets to take power. Despite the obvious feeling to overthrow the government, Lenin called for patience. Lenin and the Bolsheviks acted to restrain the movement for one key reason – that the initiative of workers was probably enough to seize power, but not yet to hold it. A half made revolution risked being drowned in blood by the old order.

The retreat in July cost the Bolsheviks dearly. The "moderate" socialists in the soviet, terrified of taking power and equally terrified of losing control, called loyal troops into Petrograd, disarmed revolutionary regiments, introduced the death penalty at the front for desertion and witchhunted the Bolsheviks – hundreds were arrested and imprisoned and their presses were smashed. Kerensky plotted with General Kornilov to bring military rule to Petrograd, but panicked at the last minute. He wanted desperately to suppress the soviets and the Bolsheviks, but belatedly realised the retribution of the counter-revolution would extend to himself and other moderate socialists – so he exposed Kornilov's plans.

Both Pipes and Figes dismiss the counter-revolution as a figment of the left's imagination. Pipes argues that it is an "absurd assessment" to see any threat to the revolution from the right, despite his own acceptance a few pages later that Kerensky ordered the imposition of martial law in Petrograd and the encirclement of the city by Kornilov's troops!

The Bolsheviks issued demands to

Kerensky – to arm the workers, to summon loyal troops to the city – but they really spoke over his head to the workers and soldiers in the city. If the government was willing to flirt with counter-revolution, it had to be exposed. But the immediate threat was from Kornilov, and the working class sprang with all its initiative and strength to beating it. Fighting companies were formed in factories, "railroad workers tore up and barricaded the tracks in order to hold back Kornilov's army... All the big stations had their own soviets, their railroad workers' and their military committees. The telegraphers kept them informed of all events, all movements, all changes. The telegraphers also held up the orders of Kornilov." (Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*.) Faced with such opposition, the coup attempt fell apart.

The attempted coup decisively altered the balance between the soviets and the government. Price wrote at the time, "The masses in the country won't endure a coalition government which betrays the revolution behind their backs any longer." The bourgeois parties in government pushed to continue the war at the expense of social reform and, combined with the masses' new sense of power and confidence, the polarisation between the classes sharpened.

This is an element today's revisionist historians neglect entirely. Refusing to see class as the central divide in Russian society, they cannot understand why the revolution did not restrict itself to developing parliamentary democracy. So, while accepting that the Kerensky government was weak and ineffectual, they insist a different coalition could have resolved Russia's crisis. But the crisis was not purely driven by the mood of those at the bottom of society, but also by the increasing intolerance of the capitalist

class towards any aspect of workers' control and the landowners' resistance to the widespread seizure of estates by the peasantry. The choice in October was not between workers' power and parliamentary democracy, but between workers' power and the imposition of a dictatorship intent on smashing the soviets and returning the estates to the rich landowners.

By September the Bolsheviks had won the majority in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets. The party grew enormously – from 24,000 in February to 240,000 in August. The vast majority who joined were workers and soldiers. This was no small conspiratorial group, but a mass party. Millions were moving towards revolutionary ideas. Betrayed by the leaders installed by the February Revolution – with all the conditions of war, food shortages, repression from landlords and bosses still intact – workers and peasants increasingly identified with the Bolshevik slogans: bread, peace and land. These were not, as Pipes argues, "ideas which the socialists planted in the mind of the population" – they related to the mood growing from the general crisis.

Workers' control over the factories increased as bosses tried to sabotage production or close factories. At the front the army was disintegrating as more and more refused to fight a war they did not believe in. Peasants seized land from the estates. In other words, in real life power was already passing to the masses on the ground. All that remained was the seizure of political power.

Lenin was clear that holding power was not the task of a tiny minority, but something the whole population must take on. Far from lustng after personal power at the expense of the majority, he argued, "To be successful, insurrection must rely not upon conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class... Insurrection must rely upon a

revolutionary upsurge of the people."

It is true that the October insurrection did not look like the February Revolution. It was not a spontaneous outpouring onto the streets, but a carefully organised seizure of key areas of the city by armed workers. It is not true, however, that it was carried out without the support of the majority. It was an intensely popular revolution, the realisation of the aspirations of millions of people. Hardly anyone bothered to defend the government. This is backed up by Sukhanov, a Menshevik and no fan of the Bolsheviks, in a quote absent in either Pipes or Figes' books:

"To talk about military conspiracy instead of national insurrection, when the party was followed by the overwhelming majority of the people, when the party had already de facto conquered all real power and authority, was clearly an absurdity."

To argue October was the work of one small dictatorial group not only ignores the fact that the Bolsheviks were a mass party, but also that the party could not have singlehandedly created the conditions for

workers' power. Those conditions were built through a myriad of organisations on the ground – the national network of soviets, factory committees, trade unions, militias, Red Guards, co-ops, cultural associations – by millions of workers.

Workers' actions in 1917 were not carried out blindly, but were "a cautious and painful development of consciousness." That consciousness was not invented by the Bolsheviks. By October the working class had tried

everything else. The government had betrayed them, the moderate socialists had betrayed them, demonstrations had brought either repression or limited gains which no longer satisfied their hopes for a better life, and the counter-revolutionary threat had made the stakes clear – go forward or be smashed.

The Bolsheviks were decisive in October – without a party constantly raising the level of the most advanced sections of the class, the revolution would not have been able to break the political and economic power of the capitalists and their defenders. But

decimated the working class in the years following 1917 – it was not a result of the way the revolution was won.

The independent activity of the masses held centre stage in the revolution. It was this which overthrew the tsar, built workers' organisations including the Bolshevik Party – and, coupled with the betrayals of the other parties in Russia, gave the Bolsheviks the support necessary to prosecute for power.

The Russian Revolution was the high point of workers' consciousness of themselves as a class, and of their



they did not substitute for the class. Workers knew that the Bolsheviks had argued against the war when it was unpopular. Now Bolshevik slogans articulated the demands of the advanced class and pulled millions more behind.

The way the revolution was constricted, embattled, and ultimately destroyed was a huge tragedy for the world working class. What happened in Russia was a direct result of the civil war, invasion and famine that

awakening realisation that in their hands lay the material and creative capability to construct an equal and democratic state. Any other interpretation writes this tremendous revolutionary force out of history and by definition obliterates the possibility of revolutionary change today. A true reading of history consigns the right wing conspiracy theories to the dustbin. The overwhelming victors in 1917 were not a small clique, but the working class and the oppressed of Russia. ■

**The Palestinian masses are fighting back against the state of Israel which stole their land and has oppressed them for over fifty years.**

It's David versus Goliath: thanks to US aid, Israel is the most heavily armed state in the Middle East, and it is using guns, tanks, helicopters and missiles against a people armed for the most part only with stones and bare hands – plus a lot of courage and determination. The casualties of the conflict are almost entirely Palestinian, including women and children.

this year.

But then, the "peace process" has always been a farce, and has delivered nothing to most Palestinians. The Israeli army still occupies large areas of the West Bank and Gaza, supposedly the basis of a new Palestinian state, and Jewish settlements in Arab areas continue unabated.

The Camp David talks between Barak and Yasser Arafat broke down because Israel refused to make concessions to legitimate Palestinian demands. Barak is trying to achieve through force what he failed to win at the negotiating table.

general strike in the camps), Egypt and other centres.

It is the region's working class, overwhelmingly sympathetic to their cause, that the Palestinians need to look to as the only force capable of winning justice. Ultimately it is a class struggle between the mass of workers and the poor of the whole region on the one hand and the rulers of Israel (and their US backers) and the Arab states on the other.

Despite the mythology promoted by Israel's supporters, the establishment of Israel in 1948 had nothing to do with providing a safe haven for Jews. Both

# Uprising in Palestine

The first thing that socialists have to say is that we support the struggle of the Palestinians unconditionally. And despite the casualties, it is a good thing that they are fighting back. The alternative is to accept defeat – to give up the fight for self-determination and basic human rights, to allow thousands of refugees to continue to rot in the camps.

The current conflict was not "started by the Palestinians", as the Israeli government and its apologists in the West would have you believe. It was deliberately orchestrated, sparked by a "visit" to Jerusalem's Temple Mount by Ariel Sharon, accompanied by a thousand troops.

Sharon is the leader of the hard right Likud party, which has always opposed any concessions to the Palestinians. He is infamous for organising the slaughter of hundreds of Palestinian refugees in the Sabra and Chatila camps during Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

So his appearance at Temple Mount was a blatant provocation. When Palestinians understandably protested, it gave the Israeli Defence Force the "excuse" to start shooting.

Nor can the provocation be explained away as a maverick action. There is no way Sharon could have done it without the support of Labor Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Indeed, Barak is now talking of forming a "government of national unity" with Sharon.

Moreover, Israel's claim on Temple Mount is completely new, brought up only since the Camp David negotiations in July

But Arafat and the leadership of the Palestinian Authority are also to blame. The concessions they have made during and since the Oslo conference seven years ago have only encouraged Israel to make new demands, as with Temple Mount.

The intifada (uprising) that led to the Oslo negotiations was wound back – yet it was only this mass, collective defiance that forced Israel onto the back foot. In the absence of that struggle, Israel regained the upper hand.

Many Palestinians are now thoroughly disillusioned with Arafat and the "peace process". Unfortunately some have turned to Islamic fundamentalist organisations like Hamas, which takes a more militant stand against Israel and the US.

The narrow, undemocratic nationalism of these organisations (along with the generally reactionary character of Islamic fundamentalism) will prove as much of a dead-end as the corrupt Arab leaders to whom Arafat has always looked for support. They have all betrayed the Palestinians at one time or another.

Yet there are some heartening signs. For the first time in many years, Arab Israelis – Christian and Muslim – are joining the protests. Although they have Israeli citizenship, they are second class citizens, barred from many jobs and from living in predominantly Jewish areas and suffering daily racism and discrimination.

And there has been an explosion of anger across the region, with solidarity actions in Jordan (the largest demonstration in ten years), Lebanon (a



the US and Britain turned Jewish refugees from Europe away.

The reality is that Israel was set up, funded and armed to be a watchdog for US interests in the region, a project that required the bloody eviction of Palestinians from their homeland.

As long as this fundamental injustice is not addressed, Palestinian resistance will continue. ■

**Tess Lee Ack**

THIS IS THE SECOND INSTALMENT OF RED WORDS. RESPONSE TO THIS LITERARY SECTION OF OUR MAGAZINE HAS BEEN VERY POSITIVE AND WE HOPE TO BRING READERS MORE ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS ALONG WITH REPRINTING CLASSIC SOCIALIST POEMS AND EXCERPTS IN THE FUTURE.  
WE ENCOURAGE ALL READERS TO SEND THEIR OWN CONTRIBUTIONS TO RED WORDS.

# RED WORDS

## S a r a h K i r s c h

Sarah Kirsch is one of the generation of German authors born during the 1930s who consciously chose to live and write in Stalinist East Germany. Deeply committed to a vision of socialism, her work is a very personal record of the anguish confronting those who confused the sordid reality of East Germany with their hopes and beliefs in Marxism. Although not overtly political, Kirsch's intimate and subtle poems are haunting and resonant comments on the domestic implications and effects of lonely and alienated lives under capitalism and state capitalism. *Separation (I)* is one of the lost poems Kirsch wrote before defecting to the West in 1977.

New translation by Dougal McNeill

### SEPARATION (I)

**Everyone drinks their own whisky, you see,  
"Three Swallows" for him / "Four Roses" for me.**

### SEPARATION (II)

**When I'm in a house that has no door  
I leave through the window.  
But walls, walls, and NO CURTAINS -  
where am I, that...**

## H e l e n K e l l e r

In the early part of the 20th Century the *International Socialist Review* was one of the leading magazines on the American left scene, and was a practical organising tool as well as a battleground for the contesting ideologies of the time. In January 1913 Helen Keller wrote the following letter of support. Although it is no revolutionary tract, Keller's sense of injustice, and her feeling of solidarity, make this letter inspiring reading.

Dear John,

I am sending the check which Mr. Davis paid me for the Christmas sentiments I sent him. Will you give it to the brave girls who are striving so courageously to bring about the emancipation of the workers in Little Falls? They have my warmest sympathy. Their cause is my cause. If they are denied a living wage, I am also defrauded. While there are industrial slaves I cannot be free. My hunger is not satisfied while they are unfed. I cannot enjoy the good things of life which come to me if they are hindered and neglected. I want all the workers of the world to have sufficient money to provide the elements of a normal standard of living - a decent home, healthful surroundings, opportunity for education and recreation. I want them to have the same blessings that I have. I, deaf and blind, have been helped to overcome many obstacles. I want them to be helped as generously in a struggle which resembles my own in many ways. Surely the things that the workers demand are not unreasonable. It cannot be unreasonable to ask a society a fair chance for all. It cannot be unreasonable to demand the protection of women and little children and an honest wage for all who give time and energy to industrial occupations. When indeed shall we learn that we are all related one to the other, that we are all members of the one body?... Until the great mass of people shall be filled with the sense of responsibility for each other's welfare, social justice can never be attained.

With love from all of us, I am, Affectionately,  
Helen

RED WORDS

# just what are your politics anyway?

**The more observant among you may have noticed that this magazine's politics aren't quite the same as the mainstream media's. So just where do we stand? Below are some of the basic political ideas behind our magazine.**

**Socialism** Capitalism is a system of crisis, exploitation and war in which production is for profit, not human need.

Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over its production or distribution. A new society can only be built when workers collectively seize control of that wealth and create a new state in which they will make the decisions about the economy, social life and the environment.

**Workers Power'** Only the working class has the power to create a society free from exploitation, oppression and want.

Liberation can be won only through the struggles of workers themselves, organised independently of all other classes and fighting for real workers' power – a new kind of state based on democratically elected workers' councils.

China and Cuba, like the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, have nothing to do with socialism. They are repressive state capitalist regimes. We support the struggles of workers against every ruling class.

**Revolution Not Reformism** Despite the claims of Labour, Alliance and trade union leaders, the structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class.

They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against workers.

There is no parliamentary road to socialism.

**Internationalism** Workers in every country are exploited by capitalism, so the struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle.

We oppose everything that divides workers of different countries. We oppose all immigration controls.

We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries. We oppose imperialism and support all genuine national liberation struggles.

**Liberation From Oppression** We fight for democratic rights. We are opposed to the oppression of women, Māori, Pacific Islanders, gays and lesbians. These forms of oppression are used to divide the working class.

We support the right of all oppressed groups to organise for their own defence.

All these forms of liberation are essential to socialism and impossible without it.

**Tino Rangatiratanga** We support the struggle for tino rangatiratanga.

Māori capitalists and politicians have no interest in achieving tino rangatiratanga for working class Māori.

The Government and corporate warriors' approach to Treaty claims has benefited a Māori elite while doing little for working class Māori.

Tino rangatiratanga cannot be achieved within capitalism. It will only become a reality with the establishment of a workers' state and socialist society.

**Revolutionary Organisation** To achieve socialism, the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. Such a party can only be built by day to day activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

We are beginning to build such a party, linking the ideas of revolutionary socialism to workers' struggles against the system. If you agree with our ideas and want to fight for socialism, we urge you to join us.

check out our new website – for meeting details, online articles, cool links & more, point your web browser at:

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## *Figment of our imagination?*

*Jesus - History's most famous missing person* by John Rose is the first pamphlet to be put out by Redactor RePrints. It's an easy to read, 20 page pamphlet which looks at the lack of evidence for the existence of a historical Jesus Christ.

Originally published in the December 1999 issue of the UK journal *International Socialism*, it's on the ISO branch bookstall or available by sending a koha (donation) to Redactor RePrints at 289 Rintoul Street, Newtown, Wellington.



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**We welcome all contributions.**

**Please let us know about upcoming protests, meetings, conferences and other activities so we can advertise them and let others know too.**

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# Socialist<sup>\$2</sup> Review

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crisis, unemployment,  
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global warming,  
fees and debt...**

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